

Be Wise: STDs Are On The Rise

Diary excerpt of a Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) victim; I am now adorned with the scarlet letter. Wrapped in shame as I wear the silent scarlet S. Holding this secret deep inside my being, undesirable damaged goods. Who will love me now? Will I ever have children, a normal life, and marriage? Why did this happen to me? Things like this don't happen to people like me. I come from a good family; have a great circle of friends. I cannot look one person directly in the face now; surely they will know my shame. How can I tell someone about this? Surely I am no longer a desirable person.

Entrenched in fear, I shall keep this secret to myself and shut myself off from the rest of the world. My doctor told me that as long as I protect myself, I do not have to tell anyone about this unless I truly trust him or her. How can I trust anyone? The one person I trusted and loved, lied to me and gave me this dreaded disease. I could never do that to another person. The guilt would be too great to bear.

I am no longer with the person who gave this to me. I left for other reasons, should have left earlier, but decided to believe them about not knowing, because I was in love, naive, and afraid to let anyone else know that I had a sexually transmitted disease. Now I sit here and wonder about what I am to do about allowing another person into my life.

Is this your letter? It could be. One out of five people today already has a sexually transmitted disease (STD). STDs are one of the most frequently occurring contagious diseases in America, except for the common cold. Certain STDs can have no signs and symptoms and are often over-looked by over seventy-five percent of the people who contract them. It is when permanent health problems occur do they find out about them. Many STDs today are curable. Gonorrhea, syphilis, and chlamydia are a few examples, other STDs have no cure, such as herpes, genital warts, hepatitis B, hepatitis C, and HIV. After exposure to an STD, it may take anywhere from a few days to three months for an individual to see any signs or symptoms of an STD infection. These may include a burning sensation when urinating, any type of unusual discharge, lumps, bumps, and/ or itching from the genital area. These symptoms may last a few days and go away, but unless medically treated the disease stays and often gets worse. If not treated an STD can cause a person to become sterile, have heart problems, impair short and long term memory, or even cause death.

April is STD awareness month. Everyone should take some time to learn more about STDs and ways to prevent them. STDs are everyone's problem. To help protect yourself know your partner, if you have any doubts about not having an STD have yourself tested. Today 80% of people who find out they are HIV positive are not aware of it at the time of notification. Over 60 percent of the American population use condoms incorrectly. Make it your point to learn how to use a condom; it could prevent you from being a statistic. Use only latex condoms, other types of condoms such as lambskin are porous and can allow an STD to be transmitted through the condom. Know the risks, what you can do and how to recognize the symptoms. Abstinence is the only sure way to protect yourself from an STD.

For more information on Sexually Transmitted Diseases contact Community Health Nursing, Preventive Medicine Service at (202)-782-3964. We are located on the 3rd floor of building 1, room B303, Walter Reed Army Medical Center. Free literature, condom samples, individual counseling, and confidential HIV testing are also available.